

Selected Story.

PEACE MERWIN'S ROMANCE.

Peace Merwin represented six generations of New England aristocracy. The gray stone house on Piety street in which she lived was the home of her ancestors. A high brick wall surrounded the grounds, broken by an iron grille that led up to the front porch. A white marble bust of a man and one of a woman guarded each side of the grille perched high on the wall and staring straight ahead. As the clock struck at midnight they were believed to turn and look into each other's faces, as they had done for the first time a hundred years before, when Peace Merwin had flung herself lovelorn from a window at midnight and been dashed to death on the flagstones below.

Back of the house was a flower garden, a glass house for winter roses and an orchard of peach and apple trees.

Peace Merwin's mother had died when she was ten years old, and at that tender age she had assumed the care of the household, a thoughtful, elderly child. Her father became a recluse, and they lived together summer and winter, seldom leaving home for a day, for what was so cool and fresh as their own vine-shaded veranda that looked over the gay and fragrant garden? or what was so pure and lovely as their own orchard when the boughs were snow laden?

The child grew into a patient girl, with no longing for the world; then slowly, without a protest, her youth slipped away, and she felt no bitterness when she realized that it was gone.

When her father died she was the last of her race and alone in the world.

II.

Devon had come to Cliffordtown hoping to get pupils in drawing and painting; but he hoped in vain. The hard New England winter came on, his little store of money was nearly gone, and his strength was going every day. He struggled up and down from his studio in the town to the house he boarded in on the hill. It was ancient and dilapidated, with a great square chimney thrusting itself out of the pointed roof, seeming almost to cleave the house in two. It belonged to a widow and her daughter, as poor as he himself, who resented his presence even as they took his weekly pittance.

One day a low-voiced, calm-browed woman entered his studio, and told him she had just seen a little picture of his in a shop window. It was a water color sketch of a slender, leafless tree, alone on a strip of land that jutted out into the river. It was sharp and black against a pale sunset, and was reflected deep down in the smooth water. It had struck her fancy and she had bought it. Would he permit her to see more of his work?

He set a chair before his portfolio with a shy grace of hospitality, and she turned over the sketches slowly.

Other sketches were pinned upon the wall, in charcoal and oil, all more or less striking, and some of daring merit.

The visitor, Peace Merwin, glanced from the sketches to the artist.

He was tall and slight with shoulders that drooped a little. He had brown eyes with a sunny light in them, thick, brown hair brushed straight over his brows, and a tiny moustache. His hands were white and beautiful. His clothes were shabby and he was plainly in the most delicate health.

The room was bare and fireless and all the more pathetic for the effort of a bright-colored rug and a bit of drapery here and there. It was on the third floor of a building devoted to business offices; and in the street below was the pleasant, leisurely stir of the town as far removed from the stagnation of a village as from the throbbing life of a great city. To most of the people in Cliffordtown existence was a wholesome, satisfactory affair, with little of the restlessness and longing that lead so naturally to the arts.

Peace Merwin became suddenly aware of this as she bent over the portfolio.

"What made you come to Cliffordtown?" she asked abruptly.

"I came because I thought I should stand a better chance here than in New York or Boston, and that I should make a little money by teaching and get back to Paris, but so far I have made a pretty brilliant failure of it."

"When were you in Paris?"

studying him with great seriousness.

"All last winter, and I was getting along splendidly when I was taken very ill. It was an awfully cold winter," he added, with a shuddering recollection of his icy lodging, his cup of dubious coffee, the long, chilling ride on the top of a bus to the suffocating air, and exhausting, fascinating work of the Michel studio. Yet he was longing to get back to just that life, though he could hardly hope for much improvement in its conditions.

She separated a couple of sketches from the rest and held them in her hand.

"I must have these," she said. "You have talent. You have genius!"

III.

She influenced people to buy his work. She sent him more pupils than he could teach; but she had found him out too late, and he was fading away before her eyes.

Cliffordtown is a place of hills, and when the snow was hard and heavy on the ground, and the wind relentless, the natives rejoiced in the

force, bracing air; but to poor Devon the streets were terrible.

He spent many hours with Peace Merwin in her spacious library, adoring her strong, just personality and enjoying her face, that told of serene and beautiful thoughts. She had always loved the room because her father's spirit seemed to haunt it, and to Devon it meant the sweetest hour of his brief harassed life.

The snow left the place, the wind exulted, and great white clouds rolled in the sky. In the outskirts of the town the pussy willow was peeping.

The spring when it came was pure and coy as a Puritan maid. It was present in the gardens before the houses, where the birds were thriftily at work at their nests, and in the sky that had grown tender toward all men.

Peace Merwin's orchard was pink and white and full of hope, and he was dying. He had sent her a scrawled message that he was worse than usual. Could she, would she, come to him?

The spring was so all-pervasive that it had even found its way to the wretched house where he lived, but the widow's heart, poor soul, was proof against it.

She received Peace Merwin grimly at the door and led the way in silence to his room. He made a pitiful effort to rise and greet his visitor.

"I thought you would come, you are so good and I wanted you so much," he said.

She saw what a shocking change had come into his face. He had a good deal to say, though he was scant of breath, and he struggled to tell her about a new picture he was planning. The only trouble was that it would take months and months.

Her heart was breaking but she answered him cheerfully. She left him to seek out a doctor who was noble enough, she knew, to help her in a firm resolve—a resolve to take him from poverty and neglect to her own home.

Cliffordtown lifted up its voice against her, but she felt a wild and terrible happiness. For a few days she kept death at bay, then she was conquered.

When at last they bore him out from her house the blossoms in the orchard were still pink and white. When she opened her doors and looked again upon the world it was rank summer.—[Ella Childs Hurlburt, in Vogue.

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